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ABSTRACT

A project was created to help seventh and eighth grade students improve their academic success. Students attended a middle school located in a growing urban community in the Midwest. Existence of the problem included records of low grades; an observation checklist to measure off-task behaviors; teacher surveys that determined the effect of missing assignments; and a student survey that indicated a lack of relevance for learning. Interventions consisted of instruction in cooperative learning activities to increase on-task behaviors, the use of a student portfolio to increase relevance to learning, and the use of an assignment notebook to improve organizational skills. Post intervention data suggests that while classroom strategies and combined efforts of teachers may improve both student motivation and academic success, the success of motivational strategies cannot be accompanied solely by the teacher. Additional studies are needed to find methods of supporting teacher efforts. Evaluation instruments are appended. (Contains 41 references and 9 tables.) (JDM)

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IMPROVING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS THROUGH MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Facility of the

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May 2001

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Title: Improving Middle School Students' Academic Success Through Motivational Strategies
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May 2001

ABSTRACT

This study describes a program designed to increase student motivation to improve academic success. The targeted population consisted of seventh and eighth grade middle school students in a growing urban community in the Midwest. Evidence for the existence of the problem included records of low grades, an observation checklist to measure off task behaviors, teacher surveys that determined the effect of missing assignments, and a student survey that indicated a lack of relevance for learning.

Analysis of probable causes was evidenced by teachers' observations of students increased off-task behaviors and missing assignments. Teachers reported that students did not demonstrate organizational skills and relevance to learning as related to classroom activities.

A review of solution strategies suggested by cited authors, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three categories of intervention: instruction in cooperative learning activities to increase on task behaviors; the use of a student portfolio to increase relevance to learning, and the use of an assignment notebook to improve organizational skills.

Post intervention data indicated that while classroom strategies and combined efforts of teachers may improve student motivation and academic success, it is understood that the success of motivational strategies cannot be accomplished solely by the teacher. Additional studies are needed to find ways to support the teacher's efforts.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted seventh and eighth grade class at a Midwestern middle school exhibited a lack of motivation that interfered with their academic success. Administrative academic records, teacher surveys, student surveys, and teacher observations were evidence for the existence of the problem.

Local Setting

The targeted middle school was a public school located in a Midwestern metropolitan region. The racial/ethnic breakdown of this school was 57% White, 38% Black, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. The school district had a racial/ethnic composition of 61% White, 32% Black, 6% Hispanic, and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. Of 445 students, 49% were low income, with the district average being 48%. The low income students were from families that received public assistance, resided in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, were supported in foster homes with public funds, or were eligible to receive free or reduced priced lunches. In this school, 47% of the students received free lunches, and 5% received lunches that were reduced in

price. Attendance rate at this school was 92%, with the district average being 93%. The mobility rate at the targeted school was 4%, and the district average was 20%. Chronic truancy in the school was 2%, and the district truancy rate was 3%.

The faculty consisted of 36 professionals. Eighteen of the teachers had a master's degree. The senior teachers had 30 years experience, and 2 teachers had 2 years experience. The average experience of all of the teachers at this middle school was 14 years.

Students were required to take courses in English, mathematics, social studies, physical education, seventh grade science, and a semester eighth grade health class. Elective courses from which students could choose included technology, writing, art, chorus, keyboarding, living skills, chorus, band, orchestra, and music.

The middle school had access to a nurse one and one-half days a week. The librarian was scheduled two days each week and every other Friday. There was a full-time library aide. The support staff consisted of 2 office secretaries, 3 custodians, and 1 cook with 3 assistants. There were 2 full-time aides in the special education department and a part-time aide. The special education department consisted of 5 teachers and a part-time teacher.

The school administration consisted of a principal, an assistant principal, and a dean of students. The school had a full-time counselor and a part-time athletic director. One temporary education center supervisor, and a part-time prevention specialist also worked at this school. The speech and language professional came to the school two days a week. This school also had access to a school psychologist and a social worker.

The targeted middle school was constructed in 1928 and was a 2 story building that contained 30 classrooms and housed seventh and eighth grade students. The building had phone and Internet access service in every classroom, laboratories for cooking, sewing, technology and computer uses, Channel One service, and two gymnasiums. It also included a library, a cafeteria, a central office, and a counselor's office.

The middle school was unique in many ways. The staff supported each other and truly cared for the students. The school was continuing its movement towards the middle school concept which allowed teachers more opportunity to work together in the best interests of the students. The administration developed a scheduling rotation for seventh graders to be exposed to various electives. In general, students were happy and felt safe and comfortable.

As this school developed its middle school concept, teachers had more time to work together after school to plan activities, work on student interventions, and support one another. Those changes allowed the school to continue to move from a mini high school to a middle school setting which allowed the students a more nurtured environment. A new bell schedule was adopted which allowed the two grades separate passing times between classes.

Community Setting

The targeted school was located in a Midwestern community of approximately 42,000 people. The area was rich in Native American history and culture. Access to a major river made trading and transportation easier for early fur traders and settlers. Arrival of the railroad made this a key area of uniting the eastern half of the United States

with the westward expansion. Early industries included lumbering, railroading, and manufacturing of farm implements.

The community had several large employers and offered low lease rates for attracting new businesses. Tourism flourished with the introduction of riverboat gambling. The community offered residents assistance from various social organizations, such as United Way, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Housing and Urban Development, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, and many religious organizations representing all denominations.

Cultural and recreational attractions were numerous and varied. Indoor activities included a fitness and activity center, an indoor skating rink, a botanical center, open air and dinner theatres, museums, professional athletic teams, casino riverboats, and civic centers. Outdoor activities offered several city parks, some of which had pools and water slides, golf courses, a zoo, a river trail for bicyclists, a state park with a museum and hiking trails, marinas for water activities and a ski area. There were numerous community events that were held year round.

Educational and medical concerns were well represented by this community. There was a nationally recognized college with degree programs in more than 30 major fields, and within driving proximity, there were 4 universities, 2 junior colleges, a graduate center, several business colleges, and a chiropractic college. There were also three major health care facilities in the area and an internationally known medical facility.

The community had an unemployment rate of 5% and affordable housing in comparison to other metropolitan areas. This community had a low crime rate.

There were two main issues with which this school district and community were concerned. The first issue was consideration of the implementation of a year round school schedule. The emphasis on year round education was to improve student academic achievement. The second issue was development of criteria for a retention policy. Discussions were held to determine what students must achieve to be promoted to the next grade. The criteria for retention were standardized test scores, classroom performance and growth indicators, student effort, and attendance.

National Context

There has been a growing concern at the national level that students show a decline in learning between the elementary and middle school years. Research conducted by Eccles and Midgley (1989) showed a decline in the performance and motivation for students as they moved from an elementary setting into middle school. Educators who worked with young adolescents found that student motivation was an important influence on learning. Students who showed a decline in achievement had lower levels of motivation (Mullins & Irvin, 2000). The lack of motivation prevented students from acquiring basic skills and knowledge and developing habits of dependability and persistence necessary for success in school and life. Students who lack motivation commonly attend class irregularly, refuse to do homework, and are hostile towards their teachers and peers (Ruggiero, 1998).

Blythe, Simmons, and Carlton-Ford studied the grade-point averages (GPA) of students in grades six through ten (as cited in Mullins & Irvin, 2000). They found the most dramatic drop in the GPA was between grades six and seven. Physiological and

psychological changes that occurred to these middle level students created less impact than did changes in the learning environment.

Muir (2000) reported that students believed teachers place too much emphasis on the rules. Students think that interesting and important topics were not being taught, which made the school's curriculum less meaningful. Students may perceive little connection to what was going on in their world. They memorized what they needed to accomplish for a grade, then forgot what they had memorized.

Simmons, Rosenberg, and Rosenberg (1973) conducted a cross-sectional study of approximately 2,000 students from the third year of school through their senior year. They documented that the lowest self-esteem and highest self-consciousness ratings were found in students between the ages of 12 and 14. Researchers found self-esteem scores declined the most between the sixth and seventh grades. The end result of this was lower student motivation and lower academic scores.

Researchers have shown that students between the ages of 12 and 14 have a difficult time with the task of learning. Educators are concerned and frustrated with the lack of student motivation. These factors bring to focus the need for instructors to find new strategies to enhance student motivation towards learning.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Concern about motivation at the targeted middle school was evidenced by teacher and student surveys, teacher observations, and mid-term reports. Data from mid-term reports for the fourth quarter of 1999-2000 school year documented teacher comments on the decline and apathy in student attitudes towards their education. Of the 221 seventh grade students at the targeted middle school, 55% received comments regarding missing assignments, shown in Table 1. The comments also indicated the need for more effort in the classroom. Further investigation revealed that 30% of the targeted students were inattentive in class.

Table 1

Targeted Middle School Mid Term Comments on 7th Grade Students

Comment	Students Receiving Comments	Percentage of Students Receiving Comments
Missing Assignments	123	55%
More Effort Needed	122	55%
Inattentive in Class	67	30%

N = 221

Data from a teacher survey (Appendix A) that was completed at the targeted middle school showed that approximately 75% of the students were missing assignments. Table 2 indicates that students received lower scores on written tests. Teachers believed that 62% of their students substantially or severely lowered their test scores because they had not completed the required assignments. Teachers also indicated on this survey that they perceived their instructional techniques were slowed down because students were not completing assignments and therefore were unprepared for class.

Table 2

Targeted Middle School Teacher Survey on Student Motivation

Question	Response	Percentage of teacher respondents
What percentage of your students have missing assignments for Quarter 4?	Less than 50%	69.6%
	More than 50%	30.4%
Do you accept late assignments?	Never or sometimes	8.7%
	Yes	91.3%
Do you think students should be required to carry a homework assignment notebook?	Yes	100%
	No	0%
How much does a missing assignment affect a student's grade?	Some	38.1%
	Substantially	61.9%
Do students who don't turn in homework assignments do as well on tests as students who do?	Yes	8.3%
	No	91.7%

N = 23

Over half of the teachers surveyed at the targeted middle school thought students' overall grades were affected by a missing assignment. In addition, 54% of the teachers

also indicated that students were not motivated by grades, as evidenced in Table 2.

The results of the survey also suggested that teachers used verbal reminders, handouts in class and notification on the blackboard to notify students of their homework assignments and time was given for students to start their homework in class. Even though teachers were adequately notifying students, students were not fulfilling their academic requirements.

Students, randomly selected without replacement, were observed for classroom behaviors that showed evidence of low motivation and inappropriate behaviors during a class period (Appendix B). A comparison was done between the first ten minutes of a class and the second ten minutes of the same class. Negative behaviors increased during the second ten minutes, as documented in Table 3. As the class period progressed, students who lacked motivational skills began to exhibit activities that involved off task behaviors. This adversely affected the learning atmosphere.

Table 3

Teacher Observation of Classroom Behaviors

Observed Behavior	First 10 Minutes	Second 10 Minutes
Inappropriate verbal response	1	2
Inappropriate noises	0	4
Inappropriate physical movement	2	4
Failed to be in class on time	0	NA
Failed to bring appropriate materials	0	NA
Inattentive at the beginning of class	1	NA

N = 5

Students indicated that they were motivated but at the same time did not adequately apply themselves to assigned activities to enhance their learning. This was shown in the results of a student survey (Appendix C) that was given to the targeted middle school students. As documented in Table 4, students indicated that they were motivated by grades. This was a contradiction to the responses from a survey given to the teachers at this school. (Refer to Table 2.) Students felt that homework assigned by teachers was worthwhile and that it was beneficial when they were given class time to begin assignments. Motivation to complete assignments was higher in classes that students enjoyed, but responses to other questions on the survey seemed to contradict these statements. Table 4 shows that approximately two-thirds of the students had received zeros for missing assignments. A large percentage spent only a small amount of time on homework each night which supported their response that they did not feel that extra curricular activities took away from their homework time.

Students indicated that teachers accepted late assignments with penalties. This should have improved their motivation to complete assignments on time. But, students knew that assignments would be accepted regardless of the due date, and they did not feel the need to turn in their work on time. The penalties were irrelevant to them. This impacted their academic success by lowering grades.

The puzzling element of this survey showed that students did feel motivated by grades, acknowledged that parents encouraged them to get good grades, and felt that homework was worthwhile. However, indications were that, though students wanted and were encouraged to achieve academic success, they lacked the personal motivational

skills to attain successful educational outcomes.

Table 4

Student Attitudes Towards Learning

Student Attitude	Yes	No
Received a zero for failure to turn in homework	65.6%	34.4%
Spend less than 45 minutes nightly on homework	82.2%	17.8%
Feel homework is worthwhile	82.2%	17.8%
Feel grades motivate to excel	86.5%	13.5%
Work harder on assignments in favorite classes	82.3%	17.7%
Helps to have in class time to start assignments	93.8%	6.2%
Extra curricular activities take away from homework time	27.1%	72.9%
Teachers accept late assignments	76.8%	23.2%
Understand consequences of missing assignments	89.5%	10.5%
Parents encourage academic success	97.9%	2.1%
Feel schools should reward students who turn in all homework assignments	75.3%	24.7%

N = 97

Probable Causes

Numerous causes of lack of motivation in students at the middle school level have been documented. Ames (1990) stated that student motivation has been a problem in education for some time. As was evidenced by the results of the teacher survey at the targeted middle school, this problem is one that most teachers cited.

According to Grossnickel (1989), students have a difficult time being motivated if they are not organized. Teachers assume that middle school students know how to organize their time for class preparation but research shows that this may not be the case. As students become disorganized, they lose their desire to learn.

McCoy (2000) reported that students lack skills related to self-direction, use of time, and staying on task. Many students have never been taught how to organize daily class activities for success in assignment completion, class preparation, and test preparation. This becomes even more critical at the middle school level since students at that level need to organize for several classes in a departmentalized setting.

Adolescents do better academically as a result of student involvement with their peers, (Hicks, 1997). When many students move from elementary to middle grade schools, motivation for academic work declines, sometimes quite markedly. Students at the middle school level are very social persons. Social motivation increases and academic motivation declines. This is a common pattern in early adolescence.

Johnson and Johnson (1992) concluded that students working together allowed higher achievement and greater productivity. Educators need to understand adolescent patterns and how those adolescents best achieve academically. Tyler (1992) suggested that the activities of the school should include experiences in which children work cooperatively with others in socially important learning activities carried on beyond the classroom and not limited to reading, listening, and repetitive practice.

Students are interested in school for sports, friendships, quasi-romantic encounters, and a place to be and be seen, not for academic reasons (Anderman, Maehr

& Midgley, 1999). Many students at the middle school age do not see the importance of their education. Their social life has top priority and the middle school setting lends itself for them to meet and socialize with more people.

Researchers also suggest that motivation for learning is diminished when students feel what they are being taught is not relevant. According to Fogarty (1997), teaching must focus on the personal world of the learner to make learning relevant. Students need to identify how the information being taught ties into their real world. They want to know if this information will be needed later in their lives.

When students see little or no relevance in school work, they lose interest (Anderman & Maehr,1994). This can create a problem in the classroom and makes it crucial for teachers to show relevance to learning. Research by Fogarty (1997) has shown that the brain senses when there is no need to retain the information and tends to let go of it. If students can develop a personal relevance of the information being taught, they tend to remember it. They realize that the information may be beneficial in their future workplace and will retain it. This becomes engrained into their long term memory.

VanDerLinde (2000) reported that there should be a close relationship between what is learned in school and how it will be beneficial knowledge in the work force. Schools can make a tremendous contribution to life-fulfilling human existence in the Twenty-first Century by means of workforce education. This would be a great educational tool in training people to be able to use their knowledge in the work force later in life.

When students fail to be motivated in the classroom, lower grades are inevitable.

An unmotivated student is not only an academic challenge, but can also be a social distraction as well. The literature suggested various causes for the lack of academic success in middle school students. Focus was made on three causes that were closely related to the targeted middle school. Poor organizational skills, inability to transfer learning to everyday life, and off-task behaviors were factors that contributed to the problem. Strategies were needed to address these causes of academic failure. A review of the literature to suggest strategies to improve student learning was necessary.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Upon review of the literature, a variety of intervention strategies were developed and implemented in various schools throughout the United States. These strategies addressed the problem of how the lack of student motivation interfered with academic success. Student motivation dealt with students' desire to participate in the learning process and reasons or goals that underlie their involvement or noninvolvement in academic activities.

Suggested in literature are several possible causes for the lack of student motivation at the middle school level. The methods presented by various authors stressed that students be involved with other students in their learning, curriculum should be relevant and reflective of the world around them, and organizational skills should be developed at this level. Student motivation naturally has to go with the students' desire to participate in the learning process (Lumsden, 1994).

Portfolios are a form of student involved assessment. Research by Koca (1998) supported the idea that a portfolio is a collection of the student's sample work that shows growth over time. It may include tests, journals, essays, worksheets, videotapes, posters,

and any other student artifacts of learning. According to Koca (1998), portfolios help students see how learning is important in their lives. Many students at the middle school level have difficulty transferring what they learn in class to the outside world. Sprenger (1999) stated that using portfolios is one way of bringing the classroom into the real world by helping students determine where their interests lie.

By reflecting on their collection of work, the students can understand their own thinking. The use of portfolios gives the students opportunities to reflect on their work metacognitively (Burke, 1999). The procedure of metacognition, which means thinking about one's thinking, aids students to become more empowered as claimholders in their own learning and to be more self-reflective. Focusing on one or two skills or artifacts of knowledge, stated Costa and Kallick (2000), lets the students and teachers reflect on the significance of what they are learning, to form goals, to apply new learning to future situations, and to develop an action plan to mindfully modify behavior.

Portfolios are scarcely a new idea, but renewed interest that is supported by the portfolio's perceived promise of motivating and involving students in their own learning and improving assessment, has currently increased their visibility and use (Arter et al., 1995). To motivate students, the curriculum in today's classrooms should be relevant, and students must be involved in the learning process. By using portfolios, students can be involved by choosing work they have done in their portfolios and reflecting upon it. Students need to use knowledge, not just know about things (Perrone, 1994). Subject matter should be relevant to the students' world. Portfolios give the students an understanding of what they have learned and then can reflect that learning into the world

around them.

Another approach to motivating students is the use of activities that involve multiple intelligences. To believe a person's gifts can be measured by one single type of measurement shows a misunderstanding of all the possible gifts of the human mind. This way of thinking shows a deficiency in the concept of human development, according to Bellanca (as cited in Chapman, 1993). Students need the opportunity to learn and express themselves through a variety of intelligences.

As suggested by Chapman (1993), all students have the ability to learn. It is the responsibility of the educator to find what learning style works best for the students. By using multiple intelligences in the classroom, this dream would become reality.

Gardner (as cited in Chapman, 1993) stated that motivating students with the use of multiple intelligences also encompasses the use of these intelligences while assessing students. Grading the learner should involve more than just assessing students on the memorization of facts. There should be multiple forms of assessments focusing on all of the intelligences.

Brualdi (1996) suggested that teachers should structure presentations using many of the intelligences. Using this type of presentation excites students about learning and also allows for a variety of instruction. He further suggested that it is unfair to limit assessment to verbal intelligence. Students need to be assessed in the same way they learn. Students would be more apt to succeed if they could use the different intelligences to explain material in their own way.

Another strategy to improve student motivation is the implementation of

cooperative learning. Researchers have found that cooperative experiences promote motivation to participate. Positive interaction is also promoted through cooperative learning that leads to emotional involvement and motivation to learn at the highest degree.

To emphasize the importance of cooperative learning, Costa's reflection (cited in Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991), refers back to his childhood as he and friends dug gigantic holes in vacant lots. He reminisces about hiding from the world, fantasizing about soldiers, cowboys, and distant lands, thinking back on all the magical things little boys do together. He then goes on to explain how he and the other boys would have resented these tasks of digging large holes and would have procrastinated as long as possible if they were instructed to go outside individually and dig large holes. It is true that humans enjoy difficult tasks when they can work cooperatively with others.

There are many opinions on the use of cooperative learning to increase student performance in the classroom. Most researchers support the use of cooperative learning because all students can benefit even if the student is gifted, low achieving, or a student with special needs.

According to Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, and Roy (1984), the overuse of methods which involve individualistic and competitive uses reinforces difficulties students face outside the school setting. Students need to be better prepared for the types of cooperation needed to be successful in both the workplace and at home. The researchers recognize that the decision whether or not students work together is important. This country can no longer afford to graduate students who have little or no

ability to work cooperatively.

Strahan and Strahan (as cited in Wells, 1989) suggested that in cooperative learning situations, students develop thinking strategies and increase motivation more effectively. They are more responsive to each other's ideas as opposed to students working individually.

Most researchers would agree student motivation is extremely important to student learning. As shown by research, as students move to the middle school from the elementary school, their motivation and performance in the classroom begins to decline. Midgley and Urdan (1992) suggested that schools should break away from the competition and contests between students and focus on cooperative learning.

When the teacher uses the whole-class approach, competition among students is intended to stimulate motivation. Some students develop a fear of failure and therefore are lost in the competitive situation. The negative consequences that come from social comparison along with the fear of failure would actually decrease the student's motivation to learn (Sharan & Shavlov, 1990).

According to Elias et al. (1997), future success of students relies on learning to work cooperatively with others. Many teachers have reported that the overall success of cooperative learning is based on the degree of student preparedness. Only when students are properly prepared can the lessons be truly exciting and effective. Furthermore, Elias et al. discussed some of the benefits of cooperative learning. Students not only develop self-confidence and trust, but also learn to work with others. Within the small group configuration, students become more actively engaged which promotes an increased level

of student involvement.

According to Kaplan and Owings (2000), belonging to a group is very important among middle level students. Well-planned learning activities allow a student to contribute to the completion of the final product. These types of cooperative groups help students become more comfortable with one another and also help motivate the isolated child to become more involved.

As stated by Harmin (1994), cooperative learning has many advantages in the classroom setting. Students working together increase student motivation and involvement. Pupils also strengthen their own understanding by explaining information to others. Furthermore, students have more opportunities to participate in areas such as speaking, facilitating, creating, problem solving, and life long learning skills.

Another strategy to improve student motivation is to encourage parental involvement. Parents of secondary school students are less likely to be involved in their child's education than parents of elementary school students. Often this is due to the fact that teenagers discourage their parents from coming to school. Many parents of secondary school students do not make parent involvement a high priority.

The research showed that students whose parents continued to be involved throughout their child's secondary school years were much more likely to complete college. Those conducting this study defined parental involvement as parent interest in planning for post-high school activities, frequency of talking to teachers, and parent monitoring of school work. Of the 11,200 students who participated in this study, only 8% of those whose parents were not very involved completed a bachelor's degree. This

compared to 27% of those whose parents remained completely involved (Engle, 1989).

There is little disputing the research evidence. Children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life when schools work together with families to support learning. Income and social status are not the most accurate predictors of a student's achievement in school. Research by Henderson (as cited in Wherry, 1997) found that the extent to which a student's family was able to create a home environment that encouraged learning was the best predictor of student achievement.

Implementing the use of assignment notebooks to aid in organizational skills is another strategy that could be used to improve student motivation. As pointed out by Pollack (2000), middle school is a time when homework problems begin to become evident. The amount of assignments increase along with hourly class changes causing students to become overwhelmed. Students also become distracted with extracurricular activities, friends, and social events. To address this issue, Pollack (2000) suggested the use of an assignment notebook in which pupils would write down all assigned work, due dates, and any other important details or deadlines.

As the researchers pointed out, developing good organizational skills is a key ingredient for success in school and in life. According to Hatcher and Pond (1998), the use of student planners promotes habits that work to increase academic success, organization, persistence, self-motivation, and communication between parents and teachers. Just as a carpenter has need for a hammer and saw, a student has a crucial need for an assignment notebook.

Many students need assistance organizing and developing an assignment

notebook. In developing a system of organizing, students need to have an understanding of what an assignment notebook is and how to utilize it. An assignment notebook keeps a person organized and aware of what is due in the coming week (Gilbreath, 1995). One must still work to stay on schedule, but having all the assignments with their due dates in a single place for reference makes things much easier.

Many middle school students have difficulty balancing school responsibilities with their busy extracurricular and social schedules. By having students keep an assignment notebook, they have a place where they can write down assignments and keep homework organized as well as giving parents a place to look for notes from school. Laase (1996) concluded that these notebooks help students take responsibility for the work they are to do and allows parents to become more involved in their child's learning.

Researchers have stated that student achievement has been increased when schools have consistently used assignment notebooks in their classrooms (Hatcher & Pond, 1998). Students turned in assignments on time and were prepared in advance for upcoming tests when they had a place to refresh their memories. This is an important reason why assignment notebooks have a place in keeping students motivated.

In today's society, it is time to eliminate whole class instruction as the only teaching strategy. Students need to become more involved in cooperative learning. As stated by Turner and Meyer (1995), pupils become more interested when working with their peers due to their increased sociability. Students benefit from knowing others make mistakes, have individual ways of solving and analyzing problems, and also share a need to belong.

Children are not brought into this world knowing how to get organized or how to study. Students must be taught as well as guided. As students enter middle school, they are introduced to many of teachers and a variety of classes. Organizing their assignments can become overwhelming. By requiring students to bring their assignment notebooks to every class, teachers are giving these students an organizational tool that will not only guide them to better study habits now, but instill habits that will help them throughout adulthood.

The time for change in education is now. Hanson (1998) stated that teaching exciting, relevant curriculum to students and relating it to their lives is critical. Students need to be more challenged and need to take a more active role in their learning. As students become more involved in their education, they can develop a traceable connection between learning and their lives. They will be able to apply what they have learned to all aspects of their daily living. As teaching styles change to encourage students to become more involved in their learning, their motivation to learn will increase. Glasser (1986) concluded that students have five basic needs for feeling motivated and successful at school. Those needs include survival, belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Students need to feel safe at school, need to take ownership and control in their learning process, have freedom to choose material to include in portfolios, and to have fun as they learn. As they see what they are learning has a personal impact upon them, they will want to become more involved. A motivated student easily becomes an educated student.

As a result of the review of the literature, three specific strategies of developing

student motivation were targeted. These three strategies include cooperative learning, the use of student planners and student portfolios. Teaching strategies that can foster motivation and provide more worthy transfer opportunities of language skills include the following: Encourage learners to take ownership in learning, promote intentional cognition or mindfulness to learning in various contexts, and increase authenticity of learning tasks and goals (Ngeow, 1998).

Project Objectives and Processes

Taking into consideration the many strategies available from which to design an effective plan of action to promote change among seventh and eighth grade students that lack motivation, members of this research team concluded that their approach would encompass a combination of diverse strategies. Teachers would instruct students in each of the following: cooperative learning strategies, student portfolios, and the use of student planners to increase student organization.

As a result of implementing cooperative learning strategies during the period from September 2000 through December 2000, the targeted seventh and eighth grade students will increase on task behaviors as measured by teacher observation checklists, student interviews, student surveys, and student reflections. In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Organize base groups for cooperative learning.
2. Utilize organization techniques that are directly applicable to cooperative learning groups.
3. Develop a teacher observation checklist to assess on task behavior.

As a result of using student planners during the period from September 2000 through December 2000, the targeted seventh and eighth grade students will increase organizational skills as measured by anecdotal teacher records, student interviews, and teacher observations. In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Utilize the school issued student assignment notebook.

2. Develop a series of activities that require students to utilize the assignment notebook.

3. Develop anecdotal teacher records to assess student organizational skills.

As a result of the use of student portfolios during the period from September 2000 through December 2000, the targeted seventh and eighth grade students will increase their understanding of learning as it relates to their lives. This will be measured by rubrics, teacher observations, and student reflections that assesses the portfolios. In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Utilize student portfolio techniques that are directly applicable to the classroom.

2. Design a series of activities that show the use of student portfolios as they relate relevance to their learning.

3. Develop a rubric to assess the relevance to learning in student portfolios.

Project Action Plan

The following action plan outline represents the time frame to implement the interventions that will be covered in the semester. Flexibility with this schedule will be needed. Adjustments to the master schedule which could affect student schedules, assemblies, faculty institute days, days that standardized tests are scheduled, and field trips are some of the variations which can reduce class time. Units have been planned knowing that teachers lack control of students' time in class. Adjustments to this outline will be made as changes arise. However, focus will remain on the purpose of each intervention to attain anticipated outcomes.

I. Preparation (July and August)

A. Gather survey materials and duplicate necessary pages.

B. Establish classroom procedures for implementing cooperative learning.

C. Utilize school student assignment notebook.

D. Create the structure for the student portfolio.

E. Compile report card data from previous school year.

II. Preliminary period to establish groundwork for implementation of interventions. (August and September, 4 weeks)

A. Distribute and collect parent, teacher, and student permission letters.

B. Introduce the assignment notebook to students. Offer no incentive.

C. Teacher observation checklist completed for baseline data.

D. Distribute and collect teacher and student surveys and tabulate them.

E. Do an activity in class to observe social skills.

F. Put students into preliminary base groups.

G. Discuss cooperative learning rules and roles with students.

H. Discuss purpose and requirements of student portfolios.

I. Interview students for baseline data for portfolios, student assignment notebooks, and cooperative learning.

J. Members of the research group determine targeted students.

III. Implementation of intervention period. (September – December, 12 weeks)

A. Review mid term grades to assess for missing assignments, off task behaviors.

B. Assign students to a permanent base group for cooperative learning.

C. Execute cooperative lesson plans two times a week.

D. Students complete reflections on their portfolios biweekly.

E. Implement a weekly incentive program with the assignment notebook.

F. Teacher observation checklists on cooperative learning completed weekly.

G. Check portfolio reflections biweekly.

H. Check for compliance with portfolio requirements once each week.

I. Check assignment notebooks for compliance at the end of each week.

J. Teacher documents anecdotal records on a needs/requirement basis.

K. Research group meets once each week to review information gathered.

IV. Assessments of interventions. (December, 1 week)

A. Re-issue student surveys to check for changes in their attitudes towards relevancy for learning.

B. Research group reviews portfolios.

C. Research group completes rubrics for assessments.

D. Research group checks administrative academic records for the first and second quarter grading periods.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of cooperative learning activities to increase on task behaviors, a teacher observation checklist was developed. Student assignment notebooks that were issued by the school were implemented to improve organizational skills and were assessed by anecdotal teacher records. In addition, student portfolios were used for self reflection and were assessed by a rubric. Student interviews and student surveys were also used as assessments for all three interventions.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Interventions

The objective of this project was to improve middle school students' academic success through motivational strategies. The implementation of cooperative learning techniques, the use of portfolios, and the application of assignment notebooks in the classroom were selected to affect the desired change.

The students of the targeted seventh and eighth grade classes exhibited a lack of motivation that interfered with their academic success. Administrative academic records, teacher surveys, student surveys, and teacher observations were evidence for the existence of the problem.

During the first week of school, parent, teacher, and student permission letters were distributed, collected, and documented. The teacher-researchers informed targeted classes about the objectives and goal of this research project.

Cooperative learning was used in a targeted eighth grade health class to improve on-task behaviors. Prior to the intervention period, an observation checklist was administered to acquire baseline data for off-task behaviors (Appendix B). During the second week of the intervention period, a targeted group of students was observed

working individually. These observation data were used as baseline information to compare individual and cooperative learning activities. These students were also given a pre-intervention survey to make a similar comparison (Appendix D). The following week, students were divided into random base groups by the teacher-researcher and directly taught social skills, roles, and responsibilities of each group member. Throughout the intervention period a research group member came into the health class to observe the targeted students as they worked in cooperative groups. The researcher used the observation checklist to document information concerning on-task behaviors.

Portfolios were integrated into a targeted eighth grade art class and a targeted seventh grade geography class to enhance students' understanding of their learning as it related to their lives. Prior to the introduction of this intervention, the teacher-researchers studied various types of portfolios to determine the one best suited for this intervention. Once the desired portfolio was chosen, the teacher-researchers explained the purpose and importance of the use of portfolios to the targeted group of students. The teacher-researchers then administered a reflection interview to two randomly selected groups (Appendixes E and F). The first week of the intervention each student received materials to construct a portfolio. Each student was required to decorate his or her portfolio in a unique and individual manner. Inside the portfolio, students compiled a variety of class work artifacts. These artifacts included, but were not limited to, homework, written tests, and reflections.

To make the content of the targeted art class relevant to the students, the teacher-researcher lectured the students before each new project. Each lecture include

how the assignments would be assessed as well as how every project was an essential part of the portfolio, which would be assessed using a rubric (Appendix G). The purpose of each project would be explained as well as how the skills needed for completion related to life outside the classroom. These skills included measurement, proportions, perspectives, and appreciation of art forms.

Periodically, the teacher-researcher would have the targeted eighth grade art class go through the portfolios to ensure completion of all projects. If a student was missing an assignment or if an assignment was incomplete, that student was encouraged to take the project home to finish it. At the end of the intervention period, the portfolios were collected and assessed using the rubric. At this time, the students were given another interview/reflection questionnaire to complete (Appendix E). A point was made to ensure the class that their responses would have no effect upon their portfolio grades.

Student reflection questions were distributed to the targeted seventh grade geography class (Appendix F). This was to find out if the previous knowledge that students had acquired, such as the ability to read graphs, charts, and maps, was relevant to the students' lives outside the classroom. The purpose of these interviews was to acquire more in-depth information on how geography was related to their everyday lives.

In order to build student knowledge of the importance of geography as it related to everyday life, the teacher-researcher introduced how portfolios would be utilized in the geography class. Students were given directions on what the expectations would be for compiling their portfolios.

Post-interviews were distributed at the end of the intervention period (Appendix

H). This was to ascertain whether the students were making a connection with learned information and everyday life.

A final reflection assignment was given to both targeted classes at the conclusion of the intervention (Appendixes E & F). These questions were used as a comparison with the reflection interview questions that were given before the intervention began.

The final intervention was student planners, which were used in a targeted seventh grade science class to improve student organizational skills. The research group adopted a student planner that was issued by the middle school to all students at registration. Prior to the intervention period, randomly selected students were interviewed to assess their understanding of a planner (Appendix I). During the first week of school, students were instructed on how their student planners were to be used. Daily assignments were written on the blackboard each week. Students were required to write the assignments in their planners. Students were informed that planners would be collected and checked for compliance at the end of each week.

During the first three weeks of the intervention period, students were reminded at the beginning of each week to document assignments in their planners. Planners were checked at the end of each week, with points recorded in the teacher-researcher's grade book. Students who were not meeting the criteria were given additional instruction and verbal encouragement. The next three weeks of the intervention period, students were given an additional incentive of a "pride" card, which was a reward for students for classroom achievement and earned them a chance to win additional school related rewards, if they were in compliance with the planner requirements. Week seven of the

intervention period students were required to show that they had completed written assignments that were in their planners. Students indicated with a checkmark that assignments had been completed. This was to help insure that students were using their planners. Points were earned if assignments were written in their planners, but students could not earn a pride card unless they indicated that the assignment had been checked and completed.

Planners were consistently checked at the end of each week of the intervention period. The teacher-researcher kept records to indicate students' compliance with fulfilling their requirements. Students were interviewed at the end of the period to see if the use of student planners was beneficial for them (Appendix J).

The research group found that it was necessary to make minor deviations from the original action research plan. The researchers found that the inflexibility of curriculum requirements and variance of the school schedule made it impossible to do weekly observations of the cooperative group consistently. Modifications were made to the portfolio reflection sheet because the original sheet was too difficult for the students to comprehend.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of cooperative learning on off-task behavior, a weekly observation was maintained of five randomly selected students throughout the intervention. These data were aggregated and are presented in Table 5.

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect in the areas of inattention at the beginning of class, inappropriate verbal responses, making inappropriate noises and

inattentive during class. Of particular note is the dramatic decrease of inattentiveness during class from the pre-intervention time to week twelve. Another note is the show of no change in the areas of failed to be in class on time, failed to bring materials, and exhibiting inappropriate physical movement.

Table 5

Cooperative Learning Observation of Off-Task Behavior

	Pre intervention		12th week		Change
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Failed to be in class on time	0	5	0	5	-
Failed to bring appropriate material	0	5	0	5	-
Inattentive at the beginning of class	2	3	1	4	+1
Inappropriate verbal response	2	3	1	5	+2
Makes inappropriate noises	3	2	0	5	+3
Exhibits inappropriate physical movement	0	5	1	4	+5
Inattentive during class	5	0	0	5	+5

N = 5

Cooperative learning appears to have had a positive effect on grades (Figure 1). The percentage of targeted students who achieved at an above average level stayed consistent throughout the intervention period with four showing improvement.

Data taken from a pre-intervention survey (Appendix D) indicated that four of

five students felt they learned information better in a group as opposed to working individually. One of the five students indicated that working individually was more advantageous. Students also reflected that they learned information better from their teacher than from their peers. The surveyed students also stated that they believed grades and homework completion would improve through cooperative learning activities.

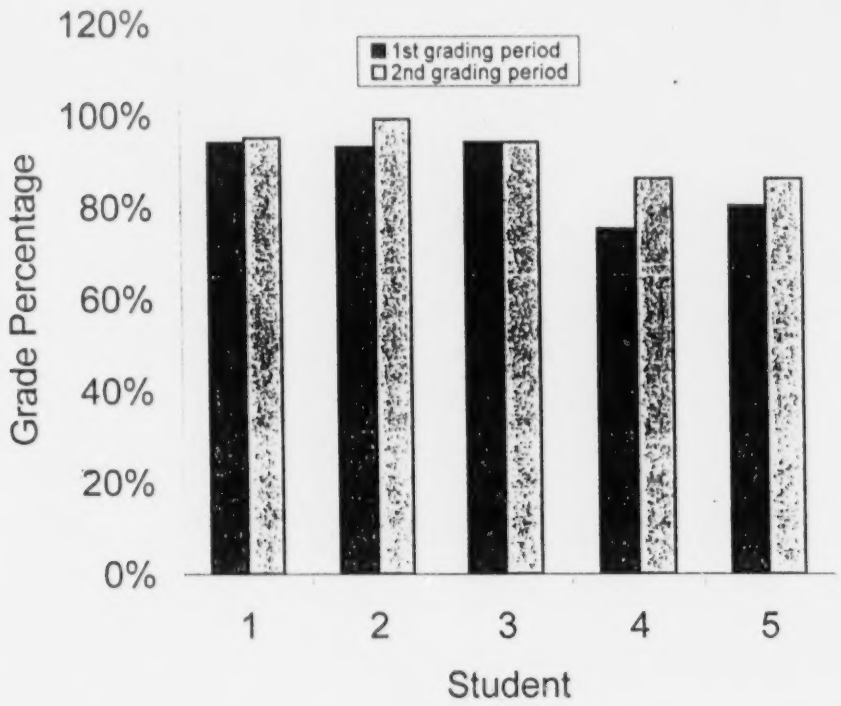

Figure 1. Grade comparisons for the targeted eighth grade health class during the cooperative learning intervention from the first grading period to the second grading period.

A post-intervention survey (Appendix K) was given to determine students' on-task behaviors. Students stated they were involved in finding answers, brainstorming,

documenting their findings, and gathering materials. Students also indicated staying on-task, brainstorming, and role responsibilities were areas where they could improve. Students further reflected that cooperative learning was beneficial to their learning by improving their social skills and their understanding of assignments as they collaborated with each other.

In order to assess the effects of portfolios on relevancy to learning, students in the targeted seventh grade geography class were given reflections and interviews prior to the intervention. Student responses appeared to be unclear. Student comments varied, but overall, they did not see a relationship between the information being taught and life outside the classroom. Students indicated that they did not know how geography could impact their everyday lives. In the reflection questions given at the end of the intervention, it was evident that students felt the information they were learning was valuable. Students appeared to make a connection between the material being taught and everyday life. When students responded to what strengths they received from the portfolios, many indicated it helped them improve map skills and sense of direction. They appeared to gain a broader knowledge of world climates. The students also acknowledged that the continued use of portfolios could be beneficial to their learning.

Figure 2 shows the pre-intervention and post-intervention comparison of the first grading period to the second grading period in the targeted seventh grade geography class. When comparing grades before and after the intervention, it is evident that the percentage of students receiving "As" doubled. The percentage of students receiving "Bs" decreased. Figure 2 also showed that the other grades remained constant. It

appeared that the use of portfolios in the targeted seventh grade geography class had a slight effect on the students' academic success.

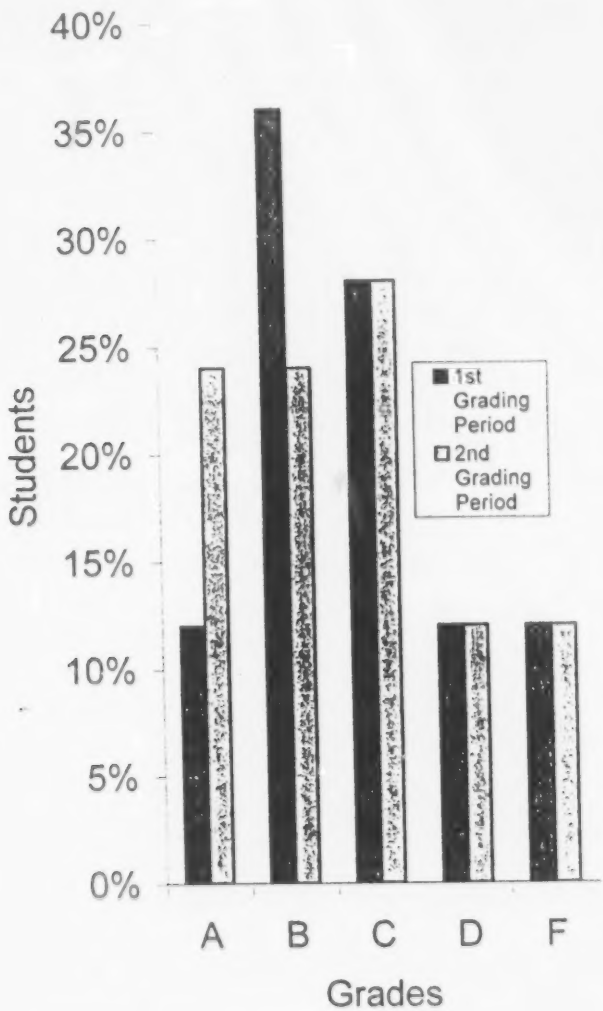

Figure 2. Grade comparisons during the portfolio intervention period from the first grading period to the second period in the targeted seventh grade geography class.

Prior to the intervention the targeted eighth grade art class was given a questionnaire (Appendix E). The intention of this questionnaire was to assess student

feelings on what they considered to be art and how art affected their lives in and out of school. Eighty percent of the responses indicated that they had limited knowledge of what the word art encompassed (Figure 3). Twenty percent of the responses indicated a connection between art and everyday life.

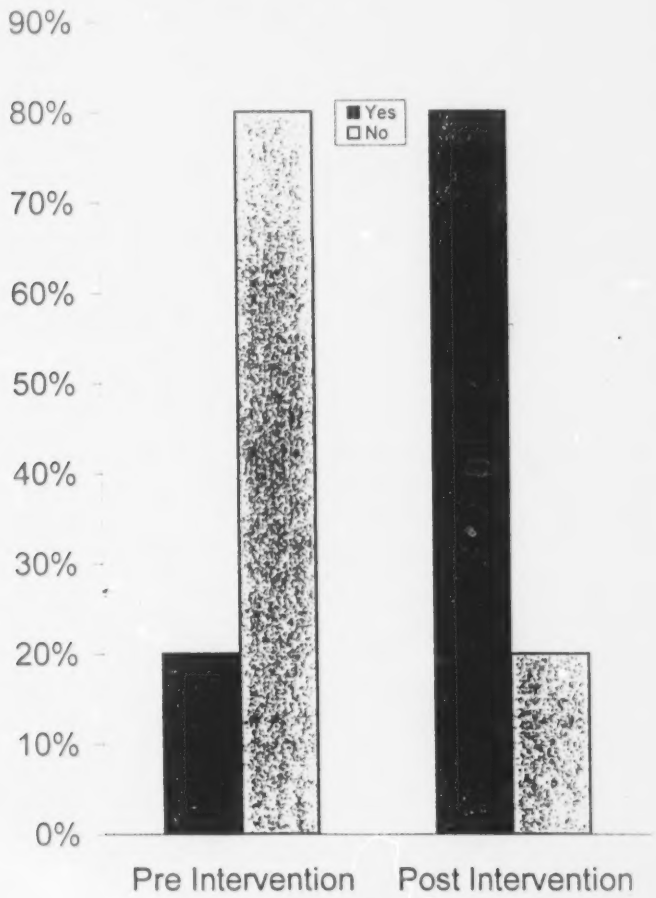

Figure 3. Targeted seventh grade art class showing percentage of students expressing knowledge of relevancy between art and everyday life before and after intervention period.

Based on the post-intervention questionnaire (Appendix E) there appeared to be a

dramatic increase in students' knowledge of what being artistic means. The results noted eighty percent of the students now indicated they saw a connection between art and their everyday lives (Figure 3). Knowledge gained from the lectures and the process of completing the portfolios appeared to have motivated the students. Not one student had a missing assignment or an incomplete assignment at the end of the intervention period.

In order to assess the effects of student planners on student organizational skills various criteria of assessments in relation to use of student planners were maintained throughout the intervention period in the targeted seventh grade science class. Pre-interviews and post-interviews, a weekly tally of points, grade comparisons, tabulating missing assignments, and reviewing student attendance were all data that were compiled and compared.

In the pre-interview students indicated a concern when asked about difficulties in keeping track of assignments for eight classes. Students also indicated they thought writing down assignments in a planner could help them. Students felt it would also help them remember when certain materials were required for a particular class.

In the post-interview there were varied responses to the questions. Student opinions on the planners appeared positive. Students made comments that planners helped them remember what assignments were and when they were due. Students commented that planners helped them organize school-related responsibilities. One student even indicated that she forgot to use her planner and received a bad grade on an assignment. Fifteen percent of the students indicated they felt they did not need to use the planners because they were confident in their own ability to get required work done and

keep themselves organized.

Data gathered on student progress from the targeted seventh grade science class are documented in Table 6. According to the grade analysis, five of the students improved their grades by one letter grade from the first to the second grading period. One student improved the grade by two letter grades and nine students had no change. Five students showed a decline of one letter grade.

Table 6

Student Grade Changes During the Intervention Period

Grade change	4th week	8th week	12th week	Change
Gain 1 grade	15%	30%	25%	+5
Gain 2 grades	-	-	5%	+1
No change	65%	40%	45%	+9
Lost 1 grade	15%	15%	25%	+5
Lost 2 grades	5%	-	-	-
Incomplete	-	15%	-	-

N = 20

A weekly tally of points in regards to compliance on using their student planners was documented in the teacher-researcher's grade book (Table 7). These data were compared to grades students received from the beginning of the intervention period to its completion. Data were compiled during the intervention period on missing assignments to see if the use of student planner had an affect on their organizational skills (Table 8). Data were also compiled on student attendance during the intervention period to assess if student planners were utilized (Table 9).

Table 7 shows that students in the targeted group increased planner usage during the intervention period. By the end of the second grading period, 85% of the students were consistently using their planners as compared to only 50% at the end of the fourth week. Students appeared to understand the concept of attaining points for planner use.

Table 7

Student Use of Planners During the Intervention Period

Point Change	4th Week	8th Week	12th Week
Gained points	50%	70%	85%
No point change	15%	5%	-
Lost points	35%	25%	15%

N = 20

The targeted group of students slightly improved the number of missing assignments between the fourth and eighth week (Table 8). Of particular notice, one of the students improved from a total of eight missing assignments in the fourth week to only two missing assignments for the twelfth week. This student was also part of the group from Table 7 that indicated increased planner usage. This may indicate the planner was used to decrease the number of missing assignments and, as a result, the student's grade improved.

One of the students showed an increase in the number of missing assignments from two to six. The number of points lost by this student due to these missing assignments doubled. In reviewing other data gathered on this student, the grade was lowered by one letter grade and student planner use dropped. This student also had an increase in absenteeism. These data may indicate a lack of planner usage by this student

during the intervention period.

Table 8

Students Missing Assignments During the Intervention Period

Missing Assignments	4th Week	8th Week	12th Week	Change
Increase	30%	25%	20%	+4
No change	55%	60%	50%	+11
Decrease	15%	15%	30%	+5

N = 20

Student attendance during the intervention is shown in Table 9. Absenteeism for the targeted group of students increased from the beginning of the intervention period to the end. Though absenteeism numbers increased, 75% of the students were still able to maintain or raise their grades between the fourth and twelfth week. In addition to this, Table 7 indicates that 85% of the students were using their student planners. This could indicate the result of consistent planner use.

Table 9

Student Attendance During the Intervention Period

Attendance	4th Week	8th Week	12th Week	Change
Increased days of absence	25%	50%	50%	+8
No change	65%	25%	15%	+7
Decreased days of absence	10%	25%	35%	+5

N = 20

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on student academic success

through motivational strategies, positive results were noted in the three areas of intervention. However, these outcomes may have been the result of the units studied, the time of year, and/or unknown factors. Negative outcomes may have resulted from factors beyond the teacher-researchers' control such as schedule changes and administrative actions.

The teacher-researchers of this project recommend the use of student planners to develop student organizational skills. Data compiled from this strategy showed positive results.

In addition, the teacher-researchers found a notable increase in the students' understanding of relevance to learning through the use of portfolios. In the targeted art class, some art projects introduced to the class had relevance to everyday life, whereas, other projects were relevant to specific occupational areas such as computer-aided drawing, architectural design, and interior design.

The teacher-researchers noted that student on-task behaviors increased during cooperative learning sessions. The variance in results was attributed to dealing with different personalities within each base group, absenteeism which affected group interaction, and changes in the school schedule. All of these factors also affected the planned activities. It was noted that hands-on activities were much more successful than pencil and paper activities.

In review of this action research project the teacher-researchers have the following recommendations in regards to the three interventions used. The teacher-researchers recommend that in implementing cooperative learning activities, strong

consideration should be made to the make-up of the class prior to determining the targeted group. Research on textbook based cooperative learning activities should be done prior to incorporating cooperative learning into the curriculum. They further recommend that all students should be observed three to four weeks prior to forming base groups. This effort would help in formulating cohesive base groups.

The teacher-researchers that implemented portfolios into their targeted classes recommend bringing in outside speakers to reinforce relevancy of learning to the curricular area. Developing a school-wide career fair to show how art and geography can be utilized in obtaining a desired career in these fields could also be considered. They further recommend student led parent-teacher conferences. Students could explain their portfolios and why they included the artifacts they chose.

The teacher-researchers recommend that student planners could further develop student organizational skills if more staff at the targeted school would utilize them. Staff should be inserviced regarding the implementation of student planners in classrooms and the benefits that students could derive from their use. The teacher-researchers believe students would improve their organizational skills to a higher degree if more teachers required their use.

If this project was implemented again, the teacher-researchers believe that only one intervention should have been utilized. The results from this single intervention could show how it impacted student motivation in different curricular areas.

Academic success relies on several motivational factors. Additional studies are needed to find ways to support motivational strategies to support teachers' efforts.

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Appendix A

TEACHER SURVEY
MAY, 2000
EDISON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Brian, Kathy, Becky, Troy and Karen are currently enrolled in a graduate program through Saint Xavier University. We are in the process of obtaining data needed for our Action Research paper. We chose to look into student motivation – specifically, why they don't turn in homework. We hope to develop some interventions to lessen this problem and will let you know of our successes, (hopefully!). We need your input from the following survey we have developed. Please return this survey to one of us as soon as possible, but hopefully no later than Thursday, June 1. Thanks, we know this is a busy time for all! (Just circle the answer that best answers the question for you.)

1. What percentage of your students consistently have missing assignments for the 4th quarter?
   A. Less than 25% B. 25% - 50% C. 50% - 75% D. More than 75%

2. Which quarter has the largest percentage of homework assignments not being returned?
   A. Quarter 1 B. Quarter 2 C. Quarter 3 D. Quarter 4

3. Do you think students are motivated by grades?
   A. Yes B. No

4. How do missing assignments affect your teaching?
   A. Doesn't B. Have to review more C. Slows me down

5. Do you give students time to start homework assignments in class?
   A. Yes, always B. Yes, frequently C. Yes, sometimes D. No

6. Do you accept late assignments?
   A. Never B. Sometimes C. Yes D. Yes, with penalties

7. How do you notify students of a homework assignment?
   A. Verbally B. Handout in class C. Blackboard D. Other

8. Do you think students should be required to carry a homework assignment notebook?
   A. Yes B. No

9. How much does a missing assignment affect a student's grade?
   A. Not at all B. Some C. Substantially D. Severely

10. Do you assign homework – (check which is/are relevant) –
    A. _____ to be relative to the unit of instruction.
    B. _____ to be useful in grade determination.
    C. _____ to provide additional practice for their educational growth.
    D. _____ other _____.

11. Do students who don't turn in homework assignments do as well on tests as students who do?
    A. Yes B. No

Please put on the bottom of this paper or on the back any additional comments you would like to add that you feel might assist us in our quest for information regarding why students do not turn in homework assignments. Again, super thanks for your help!!!

Appendix B

Purpose: To observe motivational behavior in a classroom.

Before class begins:

On time to class	Yes No
Prepared with appropriate materials	Yes No
Shows attention for class to begin	Yes No

	First 10 min.		Second 10 min.	
During class time:	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Shows appropriate eye contact towards instructor.				
2. Inappropriate verbal response				
3. Makes inappropriate noises				
4. Shows positive responses				
5. Exhibits inappropriate physical movement				

Appendix C

STUDENT SURVEY

Please complete this survey by circling the answer that you feel best represents your feelings. This survey will not be used in any way to determine your grade. Please answer these questions as openly and honestly as possible.

1.) Have you ever received a zero (0) for not turning in an assignment?
YES NO

2.) Do you understand what the consequences are when you don't turn in an assignment?
NO SOMEWHAT USUALLY YES

3.) Do you work harder at completing assignments in classes that you like?
YES NO

4.) Do grades motivate you to excel in your classes?
YES NO

5.) Do your parents encourage good grades and academic success?
YES NO

6.) If you are involved in extra-curricular activities, do you feel they take away from your homework time?
YES NO

7.) Does it help when teachers give you time to start homework assignments in class?
YES NO

8.) Do your teachers allow you to turn homework in late?
YES NO

9.) Should the school reward students who turn in all of their homework assignments?
YES NO

10.) What is the average amount of time that you work on homework each night?
0 – 15 minutes 16 – 30 minutes
31 – 45 minutes 46 minutes or more

11.) What is your opinion about why teachers assign homework?
Busy work Worth your while, helps prepare for tests

Appendix D

Pre-Intervention Survey
Individual Learning vs. Cooperative Learning

1. Do you feel you can learn information better in a group or by yourself? Why?

2. Is it easier to learn information from your classmates or from your teacher? Why?

3. Do you think students should be allowed to pick their own groups to work with? Why?

4. Do you think your grades would improve if you could work in groups more often? Why?

5. Do you think you would complete more homework assignments if you were in a group rather than working by yourself? Why?

Appendix E

Art
Reflection/Interview

1. In what way do you feel art can effect our lives?

2. What do you think you could learn in art that could help you out later in life?

3. What do you find interesting about art and why?

4. Do you see yourself taking art classes in the future? (why or why not)

5. When someone says they are artistic, what do you think they mean?

6. If you could be artistically talented in anyway, what way would it be and why?

Appendix F

Reflection/Interview
Geography

1. In what way do you feel geography can effect your life?

2. What do you think you could learn in geography that could help you out later in life?

3. What do you find interesting about geography and why?

4. Do o see yourself taking geography classes in the future? (why or why not?)

5. Do you feel that the ability to read graphs and charts will be valuable later in life? If so, how?

Appendix G

RUBRIC FOR ASSESSING ART PORTFOLIOS

CRITERIA	1pt	2pt	3pt
Project Completion	Less than half done	½ to ¾ Finished	Completed Picasso
Originality & Creativity	Give it some more thought please	Not too shabby	Mr. or Mrs. Imagination
Details	Kind of plain	Looks pretty good	Couldn't ask for more
Coloring	Looks like scribble	3 or more colors used	Pretty as a rainbow

OUTSTANDING = 10-12
GOOD = 8-9
SATISFACTORY = 6-7
GETTING THERE = 5 and below

Appendix H

Portfolios
Post Interview Questions

1. What can I learn about you from your portfolio?
    a. How is that important?

    b. What else do you want to know?

2. Is your portfolio satisfying or dissatisfying to you?
    a. What do you feel is a strength of this portfolio?

    b. What would you like to change?

3. What in your portfolio illustrates something important you have learned?
    a. Why is this important to you?

    b. What did you do to learn it?

4. Show me something in your portfolio you would do again.
    a. What did you like about it?

    b. How can you use it in everyday life?

5. What changes have you noticed in your work due to the use of your portfolio?
    a. How do you feel about these changes?

    b. What additional help or resources do you need?

Appendix I

STUDENT INTERVIEW
ASSIGNMENT NOTEBOOKS

The following questions were asked to a random group of targeted middle school students in regards to their opinions on assignment notebooks.

1. Do you feel that having eight classes makes it hard for you to remember specific assignments for those classes? Why or why not?

2. Do you feel it is beneficial to write down homework assignments for classes? Why or why not?

3. Do you feel that if you used one source to check for homework assignments, it would help you better organize your time and make sure you turned in work on time or prepared adequately for tests? Why or why not?

4. Would it help you have the appropriate materials for class if you had written down what you would need for each specific class? Why or why not?

5. Would you use an assignment notebook to prepare ahead of time for a test instead of the night before? Why or why not?

6. Would you use an assignment notebook to complete homework assignments in advance rather than the night before? Why or why not?

7. Do you feel the school should provide an assignment notebook for each student to use or that a student be allowed to purchase or create an assignment notebook of their own preference? Please explain your answer.

Appendix J

STUDENT SURVEY

Students - Please answer the following questions honestly. This is part of my research for my master's degree program. This survey will not have any influence on your grade. Please do not put your name on this paper. Place it in my wire basket before class is over today.

Thanks - Mrs. Nyman

1. Have you used the student planner to prepare ahead of time for a test instead of the night before? Why or why not?

2. Have you used the student planner to help complete homework assignments in advance rather than the night before? Why or why not?

3. Do you feel the point and pride cards were adequate incentives for you to write assignments in your planner? Why or why not?

4. Would you use your planner if it were not a required part of this class? Why or why not?

5. Do you have suggestions that you would like to give me that may help you do a better job of using your planner to keep track of assignments and prepare for tests?